

A STUDY OF THE REASONS WHY STUDENTS
DROP OUT OF
CASTLEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL
CASTLEWOOD, VIRGINIA

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Education
Appalachian State Teachers College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Jane Margaret Riner
August 1956

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by

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It was the purpose of this study (1) to determine the causes of drop-outs in the entering classes of 1951-52 and 1952-53 of Castlewood High School, Castlewood, Virginia; (2) to show why a student with the same intelligence, same sex and same age would stay in school whereas another equally matched student would drop out; and (3) to present student attitudes with regard to reasons for dropping out of school as revealed through a personal interview with each student.

Of these two groups, a total number of thirty-five students had dropped out of school for various recorded reasons. The writer obtained from the principal's office a copy of the withdrawal reports for the school years 1951 through 1955. The names on these withdrawal reports were checked with the freshman enrollment lists for 1951 and 1952 to get an accurate list of the students withdrawing from those particular classes. Of the thirty-five students who dropped out of school, it was possible to match twenty-four students according to age, sex, and general intelligence with twenty-four non-drop-outs. Similarity of traits of those matched was determined by careful study of the school records. This procedure entailed checking each of the 535 school records.

All youth included in this study were personally interviewed by the writer to supplement information obtained from examination of the school records.

The results of this study would indicate that the main differences between drop-outs and the non-drop-outs are economic status, participation in extra-curricular activities, and attitude toward school. The data have shown that relatively more of the students who dropped out of school were among the lower socio-economic group.

The school records indicated that thirty-three per cent of the total group of drop-outs were members of families that were supported by the Welfare Department of Russell County, whereas twelve and one-half per cent of the non-drop-outs were members of families supported by the Welfare Department. From the data obtained it was learned that more than one-third of the drop-outs did not participate in any extra-curricular activities. The interview with the students revealed that one-third of the drop-outs had poor relationship with teachers, and one-twelfth had excellent relationship with the teachers.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM, PURPOSE AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

I. THE PROBLEM

It is one thing for a high school staff to write into its philosophy the goal of educating all youth of high school age in the community; it is quite another to do something about accomplishing this goal.

The United States Office of Education has for many years gathered and published statistics to show the percentages of pupils enrolled in the fifth grade in the public and non-public schools who were retained in the various grade levels, and who eventually graduated from high school. Of the fifth grade classes of 1946-47, only 59% were members of the graduating classes of 1954.¹ This information indicates that further improvements should be made in the holding power of the secondary schools. Each of the 27,000 secondary schools in the United States is a potential center of experimentation. The various studies show that the drop-out problem begins with the original school entrance of the child, and that it involves both the home and the community

¹United States Office of Education Bulletin: 1954.
No. 4 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), p. 58.

as well as the school.

The problem of drop-outs has received some serious study, but there still remains much research to be done if the seriousness of the situation is to be lessened.

The student's separation from school may result in an emotional upset. He may lose self-confidence and become thoroughly discouraged. He may aspire to a socio-economic group for which he is not fitted and into which he is not accepted.

A school would certainly benefit from an attempt to account for its student withdrawals.

II. THE PURPOSE

It was the purpose of this study (1) to determine the causes of drop-outs in the entering classes of 1951-52 and 1952-53 of Castlewood High School, Castlewood, Virginia; (2) to show why a student with the same intelligence, same sex and same age would stay in school whereas another equally matched student would drop out; and (3) to present student attitudes with regard to reasons for dropping out of school as revealed through a personal interview with each student.

It was hoped that the data presented in this study would indicate why these students left Castlewood High School, thereby assisting teachers and supervisors in undertaking a re-evaluation of the entire school program and, where pos-

sible, effecting a reduction in the number of drop-outs.

III. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Drop-out. A drop-out was interpreted as meaning a student who was no longer a member of his class or a lower class at Castlewood High School.

Non-drop-out. A non-drop-out was a student who was in school at the time this research was being conducted.

Comparison-variables. The three comparison-variables used in matching the drop-outs with the non-drop-outs were intelligence, sex, and age.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much has been written about the reasons why students drop out of school.

Boutwell¹ attempted to determine the proportion of the seventh grade pupils enrolled in Brundidge School, Brundidge, Alabama, in the autumns of 1940 to 1944 inclusive, who remained in the school to graduate from the twelfth grade and the causes of dropping out for those who did not graduate. He did this by checking the permanent record cards and teacher's class books filed in the principal's office, and interviews with the pupils and other persons who knew the pupils. He found that 42.5% graduated. Four-fifths of the pupils who dropped out of school failed one or more courses. Dropping out of school occurred most frequently from the ninth grade or at age sixteen. The majority of boys dropped out of school to work, whereas the majority of girls dropped out of school to get married.

¹Bernice Murphy Boutwell, "Holding Power of the Secondary School of Brundidge, Alabama, and Causes of Pupils Dropping Out" (unpublished Master's thesis, The Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, 1952), p. 64.

Taylor² attempted to determine the extent of school leaving in the schools of Covington County, Alabama, to identify certain characteristics which differentiate school leavers from those pupils who continue in school. Both the normative-survey and causal-comparative methods or research were used in this study. He found that the principal factors affecting early school leaving fall into three general classifications. First, there is a set of personal characteristics including race, sex, nationality of parents, place of birth, age, health, intelligence, number of transfers from school to school, desire for social approval, poor attendance, dislike of authority, bad conduct, the lure of jobs, plans of marriage, chosen occupations, temperament, and attitude toward school. A second set of factors influencing the length of stay in school is dependent upon the home and community. This includes social and economic conditions, adjustment in the home, parental occupations, attitude of parents and community toward school, opportunity and need for work, and a suitable place for study. Included in this group of factors also are socio-economic status of the family, social and economic background of the community,

²Hugh L. Taylor, "Factors That Differentiate School Leavers From Pupils Who Continue In School" (unpublished Master's thesis, Teachers College, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, 1955), p. 210.

rural and urban environment, and size of family. A third set of factors affecting early school leaving is directly associated with the school environment. Among these factors are the organization and administration of the schools, the curriculum, guidance, pupil-teacher relationships, grade placement, promotional policies, size of the school, methods of discipline, supervised study, distance from school, retardation, and poor scholarship.

Eckert and Marshall³ through a questionnaire and pupil census card from cooperating schools, attempted to outline the characteristics of pupils leaving the secondary school, and thereby secure materials which would reveal the clues needed to modify school practices. They found evidence that the schools should (a) place more emphasis on the problems of immediate and practical living, (b) make more provision for individual differences, and (c) learn more about the out-of-school lives of their pupils. They concluded that the former pupils (a) had too few contacts with adults, (b) had little home life, (c) usually immediately discontinued the line of educational and recreational activity started in school, (d) had very little contact of any kind with school after leaving, and (e) in considerable number

³Ruth E. Eckert and T. O. Marshall, When Youth Leave School New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1938), p. 342.

later attended proprietary schools, some of which exploit youth in various ways. Guidance programs in the public schools were generally inadequate, and many pupils left school with attitudes making it difficult for them to adjust to the out-of-school situation, such as a feeling that it is wrong and weak to seek occupational counseling. So large a proportion aspired to professional or other "white collar" work that many seemed doomed to inevitable disappointment, some of which could have been avoided by means of realistic vocational guidance.

One finding of the survey of Maryland Youth by the American Youth Commission was that the emptiness of leisure hours for out-of-school youth is inversely proportional to their grade attainment before leaving school. A similar tendency appeared with regard to membership in clubs by out-of-school youth.⁴

Douglass and Wind⁵ in a study of 415 pupils who withdrew from the junior high schools of Minneapolis found that retardation and socio-economic status were the factors most

⁴Howard N. Bell, Youth Tell Their Story (Washington: American Council on Education, 1938), p. 140.

⁵H. R. Douglass and Kate Wind, "Factors Related To Withdrawals from Junior High Schools in Minneapolis," Elementary School Journal, 37:375, January, 1938.

closely related to dropping out of school.

Light is cast upon the actual school leaving age in different localities by some of the local youth surveys of the 1930's. In 1934, a study of 1000 out-of-school rural and small town young persons aged 16 to 24 in Iowa showed that one per cent had left school at the age of 12, eighteen per cent at or before age 16, and ninety per cent at or before age 18. Similar data on 783 out-of-school youth in nineteen West Virginia communities showed that four and one-half per cent had left school at or before age 12, twenty-seven per cent at or before 14, forty-six per cent before 16, and seventy-five and one-half per cent before 18.⁶

⁶Walter F. Monroe, Encyclopedia of Educational Research (New York: The Macmillan Company, Inc., 1950), p. 1296.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

Castlewood, with a population of 2,500, is located at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains in southwestern Virginia. It is located on the Clinch River and is served by the Norfolk and Western Railroad. A thriving coal industry, along with farming, provides the main income of the people in this community. Castlewood High School is a consolidated high school accommodating 535 students. It was built in 1950 at a cost of \$746,000. The physical plant consists of 24 classrooms, biology and chemistry laboratories, 3 student activity rooms, visual aid room, home economics suite, principal's suite, library, gymnasium, and cafeteria. The faculty includes the principal, assistant principal, and twenty-three teachers. No member of the faculty has higher than a B. S. Degree and several have had less than two years college preparation.

This study of pupils dropping out of school was made during the school year 1955-56. The students selected were those students who enrolled as freshmen in 1951 and 1952, or as potential graduates for the school years 1955 and 1956. Of these two groups, a total number of thirty-five students had dropped out of school for various recorded reasons. Of the thirty-five students who dropped out of school, it was

possible to match twenty-four students according to age, sex, and general intelligence with twenty-four non-drop-outs. Similarity of traits of those matched was determined by careful study of the school records including the cumulative folder which contains the student's record from grade one through grade seven along with a narrative written by each of his teachers, and the guidance folder which contains test data, background information and interview records since the student entered high school.

The writer obtained from the principal's office a copy of the withdrawal reports for the school years 1951 through 1955. The names on these withdrawal reports were checked with the freshmen enrollment lists for 1951 and 1952 to get an accurate list of the students withdrawing from those particular classes. These names were placed on a form devised by the author (Appendix A). The list of thirty-five students who had dropped out of school was checked with the permanent record card in the principal's office to obtain the grade averages of the drop-outs. The cumulative and guidance folders were examined to obtain the intelligence quotient, age, and sex of the students in question. Then, starting with the first folder in the guidance files under letter "A" each folder was examined until she was able to match a non-drop-out with traits similar to the drop-out. This procedure entailed checking each of the 535 records.

The name of the non-drop-out student selected and the pertinent information about the student was recorded on the form beside the information about the drop-out.

All youth included in this study were personally interviewed by the writer to supplement information obtained from examination of the school records. A questionnaire (Appendix B) was prepared that would be helpful to the interviewer in obtaining this information. It was not used as a check-list, but as a guide in directing the interview. Provision was made, in all cases, for recording information not included on the questionnaire. Finally, the boys and girls were asked to indicate the reason or reasons influencing their decision to leave school.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The three comparison-variables used in matching the drop-outs with the non-drop-outs were intelligence, age, and sex.

TABLE I
AGE OF MATCHED STUDENTS

	15	16	17	18	Total
Drop out	4	9	9	2	24
Non drop out	4	9	9	2	24

The information used in this table was obtained from the student's permanent record card filed in the principal's office.

The first variable compared, that of age, indicated that the majority of students dropped out of school after passing the compulsory school attendance age of sixteen.

This finding agrees with the surveys in Iowa which stated that ninety per cent left school between the ages of 16 and 18, and in West Virginia which showed that seventy-six and one-half per cent left school after 16 and before 18.

TABLE II

SEX OF MATCHED STUDENTS

	Male	Female	Total
Drop out	13	11	24
Non drop out	13	11	24

The information used in this table was obtained from the student's permanent record card filed in the principal's office.

A total of twenty-four drop-outs, of which thirteen were male and eleven female, were evenly matched according to the three comparison-variables, age, sex, and general intelligence, with twenty-four non-drop-outs. Fifty-four per cent of the total group compared according to sex were girls and forty-six per cent were boys.

This indicates that there is little or no significance as to the sex of the drop-outs.

TABLE III
INTELLIGENCE OF MATCHED STUDENTS

IQ	68-75	76-83	84-91	92-99	100-107	Total
Drop out	3	8	5	4	4	24
Non drop out	4	6	5	5	4	24

In matching the general intelligence of the students the intelligence quotients were obtained from the California Test of Mental Maturity. The test had been administered to the students on the same date. There was a minus or plus difference in some of the intelligence quotients of one to three points. On the California Test of Mental Maturity one-sixth of the drop-outs rated 100-107, one-sixth rated 92-99, slightly more than one-sixth rated 84-91, one-third rated 76-83, and one-eighth rated 68-75. Of the non-drop-outs one-sixth rated 100-107, slightly more than one-sixth rated 92-99, slightly more than one-sixth rated 84-91, one-fourth rated 76-83, and one-sixth rated 68-75. This indicates that the intelligence quotient had little bearing on the problem at hand.

TABLE IV

EDUCATION OF PARENTS OF MATCHED STUDENTS

	0-7	High School	College	Total
Drop out	44	4	0	48
Non drop out	42	6	0	48

The information used in this table was obtained from the student's cumulative folder which is filed in the Guidance Office. From the data listed it appears that there is no significant difference in the education of parents of drop-outs and non-drop-outs.

TABLE V

PARTICIPATION IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
BY MATCHED STUDENTS

	2 or more	1	0	Total
Drop out	6	9	9	24
Non drop out	15	7	2	24

According to the curriculum of Castlewood High School each student may participate in three extra-curricular activities. Those students not participating in an activity remain in study hall during the activity period.

From the data obtained during the interview with the students it was learned that more than one-third of the drop-outs did not participate in any extra-curricular activities, one-half of the drop-outs participated in one extra-curricular activity, and one-fourth of the drop-outs participated in two or more extra-curricular activities. The interview data revealed that one-twelfth of the non-drop-outs did not participate in any extra-curricular activities, slightly more than one-third participated in one extra-curricular activity, and more than one-half of the non-drop-outs participated in two or more extra-curricular activities.

This information indicated that participation in extra-curricular activities stimulated interest in school, and from the group interviewed it showed that the students who took part in two or more extra-curricular activities were more inclined to remain in school. From the interviews it was learned that a number of students did not participate because of the money involved in membership in any of the extra-curricular activities of Castlewood High School.

TABLE VI
STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP

	Excellent	Average	Fair	Poor	Total
Drop out	2	4	10	8	24
Non drop out	15	6	2	1	24

The interview with the students revealed that one-third of the drop-outs had poor relationship with the teachers, more than one-third had fair relationship with the teachers, one-sixth had average relationship with the teachers, and one-twelfth had excellent relationship with the teachers.

From the interview with the students it was learned that one of the non-drop-outs had poor relationship with the teachers, one-twelfth of the non-drop-outs had fair relationship with the teachers, one-fourth of the non-drop-outs had average relationship with the teachers, and more than one-half of the non-drop-outs had excellent relationship with the teachers. This data indicates poor student-teacher relationship among drop-outs.

The attitudes of the students toward the teachers and the administration are illustrated by the following quotations from the interviews:

He is so unreasonable. He won't give you a chance to explain anything.

I dislike him.

I had to have for English again. I failed under her last year and I knew I couldn't pass it so I just quit.

Teachers expected me to make A's just because my three sisters did.

He was always picking on me. No one in my family ever graduated so why should I. He said I was no account anyway.

I failed English and why take it over when my teacher is not qualified. She's had only two years of college. Her English is worse than mine. ...is fine but why don't he get qualified teachers.

Why graduate, I had planned to go to college and said I'd never do more than go in one door and out the other.

Why go to school when I was told so many times that

I was only a nuisance and the class would be better off without me.

One student, who had attended several other schools said: "This is the best disciplined school I've ever seen. There's not even any noise in changing classes."

TABLE VII
ECONOMIC STATUS OF FAMILIES OF MATCHED STUDENTS

	Good	Adequate	On Relief	Total
Drop out	5	11	8	24
Non drop out	15	6	3	24

As with the results of the study by Douglass and Wind¹ the writer also found that socio-economic status was a deciding factor in causing the student to drop out of school.

The school records indicated that thirty-three per cent of the total group of drop-outs were members of families that were supported by the Welfare Department of Russell County, whereas twelve and one-half per cent of the non-drop-outs were members of families supported by the Welfare Department.

¹Douglass and Wind, op. cit., p. 375.

The interview with the students revealed that one-half of the drop-outs had adequate or average economic status according to the standards of the community. Less than one-fifth of the drop-outs had good or better than average economic status. One-fourth of the non-drop-outs interviewed had adequate or average economic status and more than one-half of the non-drop-outs had good or better than average economic status according to the economic standards of the community.

This indicated that those students with good economic status were more inclined to remain in school.

The students in the lower-socio-economic group indicated that they felt out-of-place in school, especially the girls who were not able to dress as well as the average high school student. Although there is no tuition fee for attending Castlewood High School, there are many fees that must be paid such as: library fee, physical education fee, typing fee, all textbooks, band instruments, music and physical education equipment must be purchased. The clubs also have dues. One student said, "It's money, money, money every day and I don't have it and I'm embarrassed when the teacher keeps asking for it."

Listed below are some typical comments given by some of the students of Castlewood High School who dropped out

of school to go to work.

My father is a retired miner and his pension is not enough for us to live and to buy books and pay all the fees that are required at school. My mother says she sent my brother to college on less money than it was taking for me to go to Castlewood High School.

I have been embarrassed over the collections for the Red Cross, Tuberculosis, Cancer, Polio and other drives because my homeroom teacher simply goes down the roll and says 'where is your contribution?'

My father is dead and I tried to go to school on Social Security benefits and I just couldn't do it. I quit and got a job as a mechanic. Now I can dress just as nice as any of those boys.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. SUMMARY

The writer examined previous writings on the reasons why students drop out of high school.

The students selected for this study were those students who enrolled as freshmen in 1951 and 1952 at Castlewood High School. Of these two groups, a total number of thirty-five students had dropped out of school for various recorded reasons. Of the thirty-five students who dropped out of school, twenty-four were matched according to age, sex and general intelligence with twenty-four non-drop-outs. Similarity of traits of those matched was determined by careful study of the school records including the cumulative and guidance folders.

A check-list was prepared to use as a guide in the personal interviews with the students (Appendix B).

All youth included in this study were personally interviewed by the writer to supplement information obtained from an examination of the school records.

II. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this study are based on the accurateness, thoroughness, and significance of the answers

given by the boys and girls who were interviewed.

The results of this study would indicate that the main differences between drop-outs and the non-drop-outs at Castlewood High School are economic status, participation in extra-curricular activities, and attitude toward school as indicated in Table VI, Student-Teacher Relationship. The data have shown that relatively more of the students who dropped out of school were among the lower socio-economic group. The student who had inadequate financial aid is more likely to have other problems as well. Without adequate financial means the student is unable to participate in extra-curricular activities which would establish him with his peers.

Establishing congenial relationships between student and teacher is important. The teacher is often at fault because little effort is made to understand the child outside the classroom. Understanding the child is sometimes accomplished through extra-curricular activities as attitudes and interests can be developed in a more democratic manner through these activities.

The first responsibility of the high school is to set up the kind of program that will challenge the potential drop-out. Provision should be made to supply teachers who have the necessary "know-how" for coping with the emotional problems of childhood.

Individual counseling is important at the high school level. A personal interview with a trained counselor may be the deciding factor in influencing a young person to stay in school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed in light of the findings of this study:

- (1) Development of a more democratic atmosphere with greater emphasis upon student attitudes and interests through in-service training for teachers and a wider range of extra-curricular activities.
- (2) A decreased emphasis upon financial demands upon the students.
- (3) A follow-up study of those drop-outs and non-drop-outs to provide further information for improvement of the school and means of effecting a reduction in the number of drop-outs.

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APPENDIX

MILLERS FALLS

APPENDIX A

MATCHING GUIDE

Drop-out

Name _____

Sex _____

IQ _____ Test _____ Date _____

Age _____

Grades _____

Non-drop-out

Name _____

Sex _____

IQ _____ Test _____ Date _____

Age _____

Grades _____

APPENDIX B

Drop-out Interview Guide

How did you feel about school?

How did you feel about your teachers?

How did you feel about your clothes and spending money in comparison with what the other students had?

Do you consider your family's economic status good or adequate?

What extra-curricular activities did you participate in?

What was your relationship with the other students?

Did your parents ever compare your grades with your brother's or sister's? How?

Did you have any special restrictions about your social life while you were in school?

Were you ever in any trouble while you were in school?

What other subjects could have been offered in school that would have interested you?

Non-drop-out Interview Guide

How do you feel about school?

How do you feel about your teachers?

How do you feel about your clothes and spending money in comparison with other students?

Do you consider your family's economic status good or adequate?

What extra-curricular activities do you participate in?

What is your relationship with the other students?

Have your parents ever compared your grades with your brother's or sister's? How?

Do you have any special restrictions about your social life?

Have you been in any trouble while in school?

What other courses do you think should be offered in school?